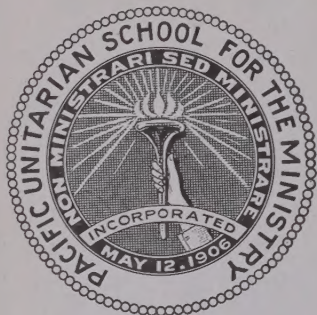


JESUS
THE
HEART OF CHRISTIANITY



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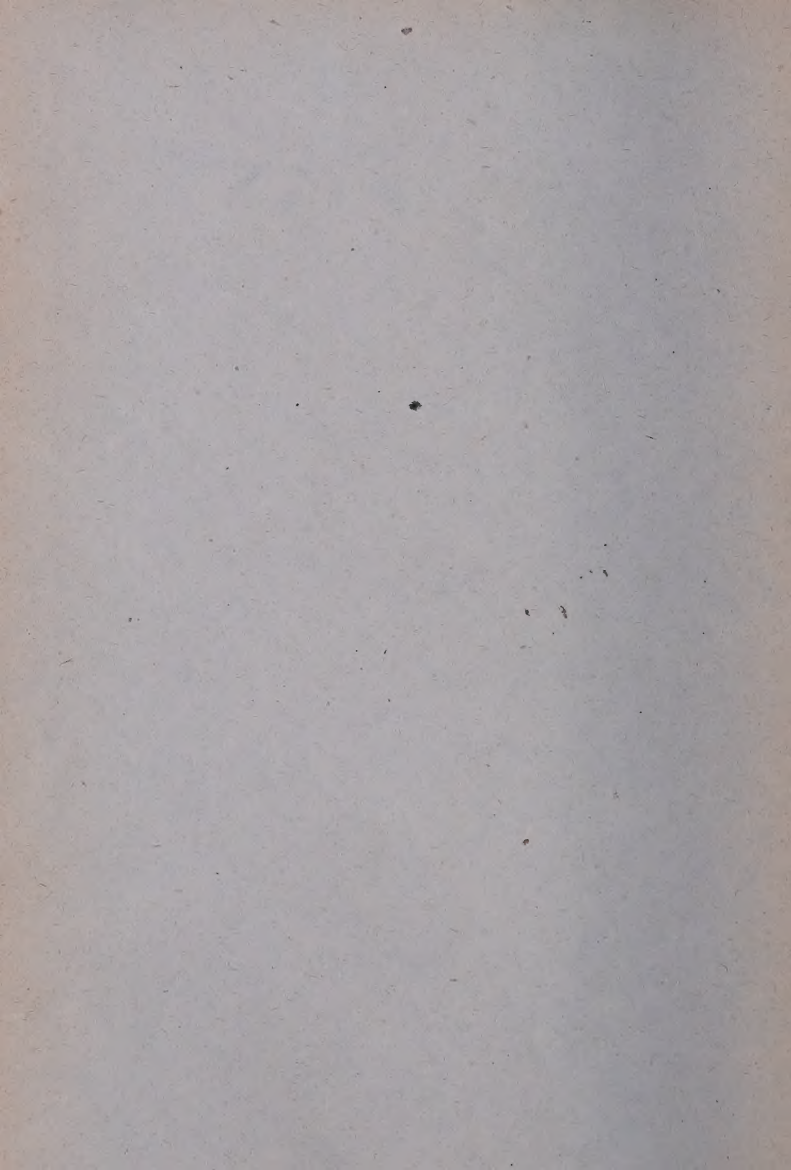
ROBERT COLLYER

1823-1912

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH

NEW YORK, 1879-1912

THE GIFT OF HIS CHILDREN



Robert Colyer

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JESUS, THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

To the question, so often asked and so variously answered: What is Christianity? the liberally disposed appear to be gradually coming to agree in replying: The Christianity of the New Testament is not a mode of observance or of opinion, neither a creed nor a church, but a temper of mind, a spirit, embodied, not in any form of words, but in a Person.

The Man of Nazareth,—he is the Vital Principle of the Christian Faith. Whatever of moral power, whatever of hope, is derived from this faith, comes through sympathy with him. Religious names and forms, doctrines, ecclesiastical organizations, are of quite secondary importance. They may help more or less the propagation of his spirit, but only as they bring us acquainted

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with him. Unless men have his spirit, they are none of his and can have none of the power and peace which he specially communicates.

The one thing, therefore, which is of the first interest to be known is: What manner of man was Jesus? We form some idea of him from the tenor of his teachings. But the words of a man are only partial indications of his personal character. What we would learn is, not only what he was as a teacher, but what he was as a man. And this, owing to the metaphysical dogmas which have gathered like mists around him, it has been all but impossible to discover. They must be penetrated and dispersed, that we may come at the recorded facts of his history, through which, and not through his teachings only or chiefly, his spirit breathes upon us with sympathetic power, and he is brought within the embrace of our affections, and we become conscious of him as a living soul, one with us. When we have thus learned to know him, his words cease to be trite, and come charged and overflowing with his personal life.

It is in the Four Gospels alone that the required

information concerning Jesus is to be found. But here again these Records are, like him, obscured by the errors which have long and widely prevailed in regard to them. I hope in the following pages that some light may be thrown upon their origin, character, and contents, and consequently upon the person of Jesus.

I. If, according to the universally received opinion, the Gospels were not written until years after the events narrated took place, then, for obvious reasons, there may well arise a doubt of their historical truth, to be dispelled only by the most decisive internal evidence of their credibility.

But I have been led to a different conclusion in regard to the date of these writings. I find reason to believe that most of the contents of the first three Gospels was written very early, well-nigh coincidently with the events related.

In the first place it must be borne in mind that, in all ages, mankind are instantly impelled as by an irresistible instinct to avail themselves of all the means within their reach to express and to publish the impression which remarkable events

make on them. The land of Egypt, one vast manuscript in stone, the inscriptions found everywhere upon the ruins of the Past, the art of writing, the art of printing,—all bear witness that it is as natural to man to tell in all ways possible what impresses him as it is to breathe.

On the face of them, the things recorded in the Gospels, if they actually happened, are of such a character that they must have struck the minds of those who witnessed them with great force. Suppose such a person as Jesus to have appeared, to have spoken in a manner that drew crowds around him, and such effects to have followed his speaking as the most natural of those which are reported, then it follows as a matter of course, that every possible means of publication would instantly be resorted to, and that one and another would be prompted, for their own satisfaction, or to gratify the curiosity of others, to record what was seen and heard. The fame of Jesus is said to have spread over all Syria upon his first appearance. Is it conceivable that it was spread only by word of mouth? If in those days note was taken in writing of any events, there surely went forth

written reports of the sayings and acts of Jesus. I could as easily believe that the people went away from the scenes described in the Gospels, never mentioning them afterwards, as that there were none in all those crowds to whom it occurred to put in writing what they were witnessing. That there were those,—that there were “many,”—who recorded the extraordinary things that were happening, committing to writing information sought from persons directly concerned, is stated in so many words by Luke (chap. i., 1), who wrote his Gospel, not because the many accounts already in circulation were untrustworthy, but because he considered them incomplete (as the first hurried reports naturally would be), and he held himself competent, from the opportunities he had enjoyed, to prepare an orderly arranged narrative.

That the first written reports of exciting events should lack order and fulness, and partake of the hasty and fragmentary character of the first oral reports that go abroad, lies in the nature of things. In the case of Jesus, it is so natural to expect that his immediate disciples, those who, having been in constant attendance upon him, were best

qualified to tell the story of his life, would be the first to write it, that it has always been taken for granted that such was the fact, that there was nothing written about him before they wrote. But, while they were, doubtless, always talking about their Master, they were, for a special reason, the last to think of putting anything in writing. Possessed with the idea that he was the glorious Messiah, whose reign was shortly to commence, they were in absorbing expectation of events that would cast all that preceded them into the shade. Their Epistles show how fully the primitive disciples were engrossed with the future. Their eyes were fastened upon what was coming. They make no allusions to past events. The only past event referred to in the Epistles of Peter (ii. 1, 18) is the Transfiguration, and that is alluded to because it was conceived to be a fore-vision of Jesus in the coming glory of his Messiahship. I conclude, therefore, that it was not the personal followers of Jesus who were the first to put his acts and sayings into a written form; it was uncommitted spectators, outside the little circle of his disciples, who, struck by the extraordinary character of the things said and done by him,

were moved to record them, for no partisan purpose, by a single and irresistible sense of truth.

While it is thus evident that, as certainly as the incidents of the career of Jesus would be published by word of mouth, they would be published also in a written form, I believe that many of those earliest written narratives are still extant. Here they are in our present first three Gospels. These Gospels are almost entirely made up of them.

That the immediate disciples of Jesus are always spoken of in the third person intimates that the materials of which these Gospels are composed were written by others than they.

Of the first three Gospels, only one bears the name of a personal disciple, and he was one of the least eminent; and although the fourth Gospel bears the name of the beloved disciple, it is a question whether John had any direct hand in writing the Gospel ascribed to him; all which is in accord with the idea that the immediate disciples of Jesus took so tardy and so feeble an interest in putting the particulars of his life on record that not until, in the course of time, a demand was made for written accounts of him,

did they give any heed to the work, and then it was left to one of the least eminent among them, Matthew, and to the nephew of an Apostle, Mark, and to Luke, a companion of Paul, neither of whom was of the original twelve, to prepare the needed accounts. Not that it was thus arranged by convention, but so it naturally chanced. And they who prepared our present Gospels did hardly anything more than compile the accounts already in circulation, and known to have been obtained from authentic sources.

However this may be, our present Gospels,—I speak of the first three,—have all the air of having been written very closely in time upon the events which they relate. Had they been composed a hundred, or even fifty years later, they would have borne the stamp of that later time. There would have appeared in them traces of objections that would have naturally arisen, and of explanations that would have come to be demanded. They would have given it to be seen in one way and another that they were written in the presence of doubters and scoffers. There would have been something of a controversial hue about them, and of an anxiety to make out a case. As

it is, I am at a loss to know how they could more plainly appear to owe their existence to the pure force of truth. They declare their birth in every feature, marked strongly by the first impression made, before opportunity was given for speculation and partisanship to tamper with the facts recorded. In fine, they are just such accounts as would first go abroad, supposing the things told actually occurred. They are oral reports written down.

We may judge of what a different character the first three Gospels would have been, had they been written at a later period, from the peculiar character of the fourth Gospel, which is in great part explained, I conceive, by reference to its later origin. As they bear marks of having been written when the events related were fresh, before time was given for any theorizing, the fourth Gospel bears equally unmistakable signs of a later origin.

The supposition that, to my mind, best explains the peculiar character of this Gospel is, that it is the work of some highly spiritually-minded friend of the aged John, very much younger than he, receiving from him all his

information concerning Jesus and giving all the credit of his work to the Apostle, not to gain for it an authority which it would not otherwise possess, but because he honestly believed that all that he had written he had received from John. It is always difficult to compute with any exactness the amount of our intellectual indebtedness to others, to determine how much has come from them and how much is our own, or has been undesignedly suggested. The author of the fourth Gospel was not the mere amanuensis of the Apostle. What came from the lips of his aged and venerated friend received form and color from his own mind. He amplifies John's communications in order to bring fully out what he conceived to be their real import. He states (xxi. 31) that he wrote for a purpose: to prove the Messiahship of Jesus; his work is consequently more or less fashioned thereby. It may be doubted whether he himself was of Jewish blood. If a Jew, he evidently wrote at a time when the division-line had become sharply drawn between the Jews and the followers of Jesus. Read the fifth chapter of his Gospel, and observe how the Jews are

spoken of as by one not of their race. The work shows throughout that it was written when the idea of Jesus was becoming invested with an official character and Christianity was beginning to take the form of a divine scheme, and the speculations which perverted it into a system of dogmas were beginning to germinate. In fine, the fourth Gospel, standing out in contrast with the three others, brings into prominence their eminently objective character, the first impression, so visible in them, made by the events recorded.

These first three Gospels tell things just as they would be told by persons who had no thought of anything but what they were telling. Facts are stated without a thought of their connection, and of the facts only the particulars are mentioned which were striking at the moment. There is no pausing to explain, or to reconcile the statements made with one another or with themselves. They not only have a pervading air of truth in their copious references to times, places, and persons, they abound in touches of nature, verisimilitudes, undesigned, unconscious harmonies with the truth of things, which ac-

cumulate an irresistible argument for their credibility, creating the impression that they were written when all was fresh, in the immediate presence of the incidents which they narrate.

But whether, after all, the view which I take of the origin of these accounts of Jesus be correct or not, their claim to be received as true does not rest upon our knowing when or by whom they were written. It is not the settlement of these questions, but the intrinsic character of the Gospels which alone can vouch for their veracity. They must speak for themselves. And here I can only say that, having made these books my chief study for fifty years and more, trying always to read them without fear or favor, as any ancient writings should be read which had just come to light, I seem to myself to have been brought acquainted, in their whole character and structure, as never before, with the exquisite genius of nature, the inimitable skill of truth, the work of the Great Master.

I do not know how I can give the reader a better idea of what impresses me as the truthful character of the Gospels than by asking attention to a particular example of it.

In no part of these writings are the signatures of Truth and Nature more numerous and significant than in those portions which relate the most extraordinary event in the whole history : the Resurrection of Jesus ; so abundant and striking are they, that, to my mind, if anything told of him be true, if it be true that he ever existed, it is equally true that he appeared alive, in flesh and blood, to Mary after he had expired on the cross. Inexplicable, incredible it is pronounced. Nevertheless, it is out of my power to doubt it, because it is proved by the strongest evidence possible, by evidence which there was no mortal intention of giving, and by which he is proved to have been alive and present before he was recognized. I have again and again endeavored, to the weariness, I am afraid, of my readers and hearers, to set forth this wonderful evidence. It is inwrought into the structure of the four different narratives of the great fact, and drawn not from the direct affirmations of the persons present on the spot, but from their delusions and mistakes. That a person of such extraordinary native power as I find Jesus to have been should reappear alive after death,

cumbered though the fact be with questions that I cannot answer, I must believe, since it is thus attested. But that these four narratives, if they are fictions, born of delusion and the blind passion for the marvellous, should be found in their minutest details to be in entire, seamless, consistency with the truth of nature,—this I cannot believe. It is taxing my credulity too heavily.

If I am mistaken, if the Gospels are mere fictions, then are they the crudest fictions that were ever invented, and I do not wonder that they are so regarded by those who have never explored their wealth of internal evidence.

Consider for a moment the story in the first Gospel of the Resurrection of Jesus. It gives us to understand that the guard stationed at the tomb and the women were all present when the supposed angel appeared and rolled away the stone, that the guard were frightened to death, and that the angel told the women that Jesus had risen. But when, according to this story,—when did he rise and leave the tomb? The stone had just been removed. Where was time for him to rise and come forth? We turn to the three other accounts, and we find that they all agree in stating

that the appearance of the angel and the removal of the stone took place before the women came. Accepting this statement, we have only to consider, how, upon the occurrence of exciting events, following one another in swift succession, time is forgotten and the most startling particulars are told all in a breath, in order to see how natural it is that just such a report as this in the first Gospel, crowding together the most striking incidents, should have been made. But taking this first story by itself, without the light thrown upon it by the other narratives, regarding it as an invention, was there ever a clumsier fabrication? It undertakes to tell how a dead man came to life, and by its own showing the fact is impossible! Assuredly, if the authors of the Gospels were so stupid as this comes to, nothing could be easier than to tear their work to shreds, and hold it up to the derision of the simplest of mankind.

If these books that profess to tell us about Jesus are fabrications, they are, I repeat, as this passage of the first Gospel shows, fabrications of the poorest description. Instead of discovering in them, as we do, numerous imprints of the

delicate hand of nature, unconscious harmonies with truth and probability, contradictions and absurdities would glare upon us from every sentence.

It is only the creations of the rarest genius that counterfeit the workmanship of nature so cunningly as hardly to be distinguishable therefrom. But there are things in which even this is not possible to the most inspired of men. When it comes to matters of fact and circumstance, such as the Gospels abound in, even Shakespeare never attempted the impossible, never presumed to emulate nature in this respect, but took for the plots of his dramas either the events and personages of history, or such old-time stories as came to hand, however rude and unnatural they might be. In the world of the imagination he ranged and ruled as a god. But so far was he from dreaming of inserting fictitious events into the God-woven web of things so that they should be indistinguishable from actual occurrences, that he treated the unities of time and place as if no such things were. That such simple-minded and uncultivated writers as the authors of the Gospels should produce in-

ventions all of a piece with truth and nature, nay, inventions that would not be seen at a glance to be in flat contradiction of truth and nature,—why, I could as readily accept in all seriousness the supposition of a worshipper of Goethe's, that “if the Almighty, when he made the world, had created no birds, but had said to that great man, ‘My dear Goethe, there is a void in Creation. Fill it up,’ Goethe would instantly have proceeded to make birds just as the Almighty has made them.”

Doubtless stories may be invented that shall wear an air of truth. There is Robinson Crusoe, for instance, which, as Dr Whately has remarked, reads more like a veritable history than any work of the kind that has ever been written. But to create this appearance, the author had to lay the scene of his story in a lonely island where he was free to invent all his circumstances without coming in contact and contradiction with known facts. But even with this advantage, the story in various particulars,—Dr Whately enumerates eight,—violates truth and probability. Whereas the Gospel history is laid in the very thickest of affairs, and numerous individuals are concerned

in it, and the action goes on in many places, and what is the most remarkable of all, the facts related are of no every-day order, but facts extraordinary, unprecedented. And yet all is in accord with truth and nature.

That these abundant marks of truth are wholly undesigned is apparent from the fact that they are far from being obvious. Had they been intended to make the history appear true, they would have been rendered conspicuous. Many of those which I indicate appear never to have been noticed before. It is true, so long as this history has been held to be a miraculously inspired composition, in a peculiar sense the word of God, men have not cared to find in it traces of human nature. The evidences of its truth have not been sought for in this direction. Now, when the character of the Gospels has come to be understood, and they are regarded as purely human compositions, the marks of truth with which they are inlaid are found to be as undesigned as they are striking. Furthermore, what puts the coincidences of the Gospels with truth and nature beyond the suspicion of being fabricated is the fact that in many instances they

result from a collation of four different and independent narratives.

II. The Gospels are written not in the dialect that Jesus used, but in a tongue foreign to his. Does not this fact render it uncertain whether we have what he really said?

That the story of his acts and sayings is told in ever so many different languages, and is the same in all, testifies to its plainness, and justifies our confidence in its substantial fidelity.


Again, it is evident, on the face of the Gospels, that their authors were persons of no literary culture. They had but a scanty vocabulary. They had not verbal wealth enough to afford to make excursions. Had they had a copious supply of words, and had they known the art of literary composition, they would have been tempted to color their narratives and to forestall our admiration. They would have had an eye to effect. There is no trace of any such bias.* It follows that the translation from the dialect used by

* Except in the disposition naïvely shown, especially in the first Gospel, to find in the incidents mentioned verifications of passages in the Old Testament.

Jesus into that of our present Gospels is altogether literal. Indeed, the Greek of the New Testament is not pure Greek. It abounds in Hebraisms, a list of which makes a goodly sized volume.

There is another thing that goes far to assure us that the utterances of Jesus are faithfully reported in the first three Gospels, although in a language which he did not speak. It is eminently characteristic of his teachings that they are not abstract and general, but either simple stories or identified with occasions. Now these are precisely the forms that render things said easy to be remembered, hard to be forgotten. Years ago there came to Philadelphia a teacher of Mnemonics: the art of remembering; and the one principle of his method was drawn from the experience, familiar to us all, that the memory of things and words is readily preserved when there are incidents by which we remember them.

III. It is to be borne in mind in the reading of the Gospels that large allowance must be made for the mode of narration characteristic of such unpractised writers as the authors of these books



show themselves to have been. Writers of this class always narrate scenically. This peculiarity will best be shown by an instance or two.

Take the so styled Calling of the first four disciples of Jesus. It is told thus: "*And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake: for they were fishermen, and he said, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they immediately left their nets, and followed him. And going on, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, mending their nets, and he called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him.*" Taken to the letter, as this passage commonly is, it has a look of the miraculous, as if it meant that Jesus exercised a sudden and supernatural power over these men. But this appearance is owing, I conceive, to the scenic style of the narration. As the borders of the lake were familiar to Jesus, a little reflection suggests the improbability of his being unacquainted with the people of the neighborhood. We may well suppose that he had known these men for some time, that he had talked with them frequently, and that it was from

personal acquaintance with them that he selected them from his limited circle as the best fitted for his purpose. His invitation to them implies as much. Their readiness to throw in their lot with him presupposes their previous knowledge of him. To outsiders, ignorant of the private and gradual manner in which they were brought to give in their adhesion to him, the change made in their lives may well have seemed sudden. All that is here related would have been told by a practised writer somewhat thus: "On the shores of the lake of Galilee, Jesus became acquainted with certain persons, Peter and Andrew, brothers, and with two others, the brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee, fishermen all, and he induced them to quit their boats and nets and go with him, promising to make them fishers of men."

The same peculiar style of narration appears in the passage which tells of the ass that Jesus procured to ride into Jerusalem. It is only the way in which it is told that gives it an air of the miraculous. The incident is mentioned simply enough in the fourth Gospel. There it is merely said that "*Jesus, when he found a young ass, sat thereon.*" In the second and third Gospels there is

great particularity. Related in modern style, the passage would read thus: "As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples to a neighboring village, where, at a certain place, they would find an ass with her colt. He bade them bring the animals to him, and if any one objected, to say that it was he who needed them." It is reasonable to suppose that he was known to the owner. Jesus had friends in the neighborhood of the capital; Lazarus and his sisters, for instance, in Bethany, which village it was probably that he was approaching.*

It was in conformity with the same peculiar mode of narration, characteristic of uneducated people and children, that the unspoken thoughts of men are cast into verbal forms, as in Luke (vii. 49): "*And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*" In other words, "the persons present at table wondered who this man was who arrogated to himself authority to forgive sins."

* No reason is so much as intimated why Jesus wished to ride, but the simple reason was, I suppose, because as he drew near to the city the crowd so increased that his progress would be less impeded if he rode than if he went on foot.

IV. We fail to understand these ancient writings unless we also bear in mind that, in accordance with Hebrew modes of thought, familiar, natural facts are spoken of in forms of speech very different from ours, and yet precisely the same things are meant by both. Thus, in the thirteenth chapter of the first Gospel, where his disciples are said to have asked Jesus why, in speaking to the people, he used parables, his answer is: "*To you it is given to know the hidden things of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*" According to our ways of thinking and speaking, the same sense exactly is expressed by the words, "*You are able to know, etc., but they are unable.*" Jesus adds: "*Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath,*" which has an arbitrary sound to the common reader. But, making due allowance for the modes of thought and speech of that time, we have here a statement of the natural law of which Mr Darwin makes so much use, and by which every organ, every faculty, is strengthened by exercise and atrophied by disuse.

The Hebrews knew nothing of our mechanical

theories of nature. They rested in no secondary causes. They referred all things to God. Man's ability was in their view a direct gift from above, given when exercised, taken away when not exercised. To the Hebrew Law-giver and to the Prophets a conviction of mind was the word of the Lord. All evil, physical and moral, was ascribed to spiritual agencies. It may be doubted, by the way, whether their spiritual way of looking at things led them farther astray than our mechanical theories are now threatening to lead us. Infinite difficulty has been found in understanding the narrative of the spiritual conflicts of Jesus in the desert. It has all come from not allowing for the manner of thinking, and consequently of speaking, prevalent then and there. When he described those severe experiences of his, which were obviously altogether natural, he was not understood, nor did he mean to be understood, as saying that they were out of the ordinary course of things. He used the forms of thought and speech in which all such facts were then clothed. And so, when he speaks of the devil's coming and snatching away the good seed sown in the heart, and of

Satan's desiring to sift Peter like wheat, he is speaking in the modes of expression then in use only of familiar moral experiences. It is a mistake to understand these and similar passages as if they were designed to assert the existence of a personal spirit of evil. This is not the point nor purpose.

V. Another thing to be considered, which helps greatly to open the Gospels to us and give us an insight into the character of Jesus, is the fact that the ejaculations of passion take precisely the same forms of speech, make use of the same general and universal terms, in which the deliberative intellect enunciates its abstract propositions.

When we speak from deep feeling, the cause of our emotion dilates into a world-embracing fact, hiding from us for the moment all exceptions, all qualifying considerations, and we express ourselves accordingly. When, for example, we are deceived by one in whom we trusted, how naturally do we exclaim, "There is no truth in man!" Those who hear us know at once from our whole manner that we are giving utterance

to a burst of feeling, not to a coolly-formed opinion. But those to whom our words are reported, ignorant of the circumstances and of our manner, fail to make due allowance, and consequently misapprehend us. Thus Jesus has been greatly misunderstood. He has been supposed to be announcing universal truths, articles of faith, when he was only relieving deep emotion by strong exclamations.

Thus, when he said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, he was not deliberately asserting that it is absolutely impossible for the rich to enter the heavenly kingdom, but naturally and strongly expressing the deep sense of the moral obstacles in the way of the wealthy, with which the case of the rich youth before him, whom to look upon was to love, had suddenly and most forcibly impressed him.

The most striking instance in point is the passage in which he declares the sin against the Holy Spirit is never to be forgiven, a passage which has wrung with terror many tender minds, and driven them to despair and madness. When

we turn to the circumstances of this declaration, we perceive the cause and the character of this strong language. Certain Pharisees charged Jesus with being in league with the Devil. And why? What was the ground of the accusation? An act of humanity which he had just performed. Good was devilish in their eyes. Could human depravity go any further? It shocked Jesus to the last degree. In reply, he held up the shameful charge before all the people, exposing its baseness and absurdity through and through; and his indignation grew so, that, while he thus relieved it, he ended by pronouncing those hardened calumniators past forgiveness then and ever. He spoke as he was moved, and is not to be taken to the letter. What is more natural? Are we not often prompted, in the heat of passion, caused only by some slight personal offence, to exclaim, "It is unpardonable!" But it was no personal offence that kindled into a blaze the heart of Jesus. He said in the same breath that they might revile him,—as, doubtless, they were continually doing,—and be forgiven. But to revile God, the very spirit of God, to call that devilish,—that was past forgiveness. Not that there is

any sin, which, being repented of, will not be forgiven,—repentance and forgiveness are one, so he taught (Luke vii.),—but because the perversity of these Pharisees struck Jesus as past repentance. What access could repentance gain to hearts which denounced the good spirit which alone inspires penitential feelings?

How profoundly Jesus was moved on this occasion, into what a heat of sacred passion he was thrown by the vile charge, is strikingly manifested,—and here is one of those unconscious harmonies with the truth of nature in which the Gospels abound, and which defy imitation,—by the manner in which he was affected by certain interruptions that occurred. When some one called out to him that his mother wanted him, transported for the moment out of himself and of all his natural relations, he exclaimed, “*Who is my mother?*” And when a woman in the crowd, upon hearing mention of his mother, cried out, “What a blessed woman your mother must be to have such a son!” he turned upon her with the exclamation, “Blessed rather are they who hear the word of God and keep it!” What thought not in accord with the emotion that then absorbed

him could then have been suggested that would not have seemed to him utterly out of place? Least of all could he endure the intrusion of any allusion to himself personally or to his personal relations.

When Jesus appears to be calmly enunciating universal truths, mere generalities, it will almost always be found that he is, in reality, deeply moved, and giving utterance to the strong language of passion; and this is never to be taken without abatement. To see how human, how real he was, we must keep in mind that he spoke not from any external dictation, but as he was prompted from within, out of the abundance of a heart so full that at every touch it brimmed over.

When I pause over such strong language as the following: "*If a man hate not his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple;*" and again, "*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say to this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, or to this mountain, Be thou cast into the sea, and they will obey you,*"—[observe, by the way, how pointed this language is: "*this sycamine,*" "*this mountain.*" Were this latter utterance not

his own, but put into his mouth after his time, would it have had this particularity? Would it not have been trees and mountains in general that would have been instanced? Why a sycamine? Why this sycamine? Why this mountain? For the plain reason that a sycamine and a mountain were at hand, in full view, at the moment,]—is it conceivable, I ask myself, that such language would have been attributed to Jesus if he had not uttered it; and if he uttered it, accompanied as it doubtless was by the commanding emphasis of the voice and the eye, it must needs have buried itself deep, as it has done, in the memory of mankind. To my ear, passages of this kind have the thrilling ring of the profoundest passionate conviction, of a faith which these forms of speech, bold as they are, only feebly express.

It is worthy of note that, when gasping in the agonies of a violent death, he who declared hatred of father and mother the condition of fellowship with him, spent his last breath in care for his own mother, and that, while he set no bounds to the power of faith, so far from ever being represented as uprooting trees or overturn-

ing mountains, or committing any similar extravagance, he never even sought occasions, but rather avoided them, to display even the least extraordinary instances of a power which he described in such unqualified terms.

I may be reminded here of the story of the fig-tree withering at his word. What is to be said of that? Does not that represent him as exercising a somewhat extravagant power? Is it not a fable or an exaggeration? Perhaps. But it is to be observed that it contains not a word intimating that Jesus had any thought of exerting an extraordinary power. No effect of his imprecation was visible at the time. Neither was it he, but his disciples, who called attention to the tree the next day. The story is that, upon finding no fruit on the tree, he cursed it. So Peter designated the action, which it would seem, then, was an ejaculation of disappointment. If we presume to sit in judgment upon him therefor, we must give him the benefit of the extenuating probability that the exclamation was wrung from him by extreme exhaustion and his sore need of refreshment. Were I to affirm that the tree withered through an inscrutable

affinity between it and the powerful nature of Jesus, I might appeal, in support of the idea, to distinguished naturalists, who have so much to say about the nerves of plants, and are so busily gathering proofs that it is the touch, not of Nature alone, but of Science as well, that is making all organized forms of existence, down to the lowest, kin.

Here I am led to say that I do not think it essential to a just sense of the greatness of Jesus that he should be thought never to have succumbed to the unavoidable infirmities of the imperfect nature that he shared with us all. There is none good but One. It is conceded by those who find but little that is credible in the Gospels that the most remarkable things contained therein being, morally regarded, too great to have been invented, are probably true. But to my thinking, it is only the great things in the life of Jesus that are recorded. Only such had the force to get written. There were, I doubt not, many small occasions in his life, as there are in the life of every breather on this earth, when there were visible in him the common weaknesses of our nature. But they were

lost to sight in the exceeding lustre of his great qualities. Fully recognizing this probability, I do not find my sense of his unrivalled moral elevation lessened thereby, but deepened rather. It brings him all the nearer to us, and we see more clearly how great he was. Even in his public career, in the course of his great work, he had severe struggles with human weakness, when it seemed to him as if he should die, and the cup that was given him to drink had a deadly bitterness. The wonder and the glory of it all was that, impassioned as he was, he was never confused nor incoherent, never lost himself, save in the Highest which is self-gain,—was never taken off his feet by the tumultuous tide of public feeling, whichever way it turned, but was always sovereign master of himself and the situation.

VI. I have adduced, as evidence of the early origin of the Gospels, the absence, in the first three especially, of explanatory comments. They never discuss, but only relate incidents; never stop to connect or reconcile them with one another, paying little regard to any order, even to the order of time,—all which accords with

the conclusion that they are *memorabilia*, compilations of various separate accounts which were in existence and circulation before the followers of Jesus began to speculate about his life, and the history to crystallize into systematic and dogmatic shapes, the tendency to which began very early, as the peculiar character of the fourth Gospel testifies.

The style of the first three Gospels, which thus leads to the conclusion that they were written well-nigh contemporaneously with the events they narrate, is interesting in another respect. It is precisely this anecdotal character of the Gospels which enables us to form ideas of the actors in the scenes narrated, far more distinct and vivid than could be had from the most elaborate description of their persons. It cannot be supposed that the writers had any thought of portraying character. Had they attempted it, and had they been ever so well qualified for the work, they never could have succeeded in producing such lifelike portraits of Mary and Martha, for example, and of Peter and Pilate, as we may now gather from the facts narrated. No mention whatever is made of the personal

qualities of these individuals; but from what they are reported as saying and doing we learn at once what manner of persons they were. I remember seeing, when I was a child, a card upon which was painted a picture representing a funeral urn overhung by a weeping willow. It was designed in France in the time of the old Revolution. On close examination, the outlines of the urn and of the branches of the willow formed the profiles of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. It was a covert tribute paid by the royalists to the memory of the king and queen. It is in a similar way that the likenesses of the actors in the Gospel narratives are portrayed, with this difference, however, that while those royal profiles were produced by design, the portraits in the Gospels are drawn without design, unconsciously. They are accidental to the scenes described. The writers have told more than they knew.

What more decisive proof of the historical truth of these writings can be desired than this, that, without stretching or straining, by the light thrown upon them by familiar principles of human nature, the persons who figure in them

pass before us, distinct, natural, self-consistent individuals? Brief and sketchy as they are, and just because they are so,—because they state only matters of fact, with never a thought of depicting a single feature of any person introduced,—they yet give us such a knowledge of the persons whom they mention that, once thus seen, these persons are as recognizable as so many familiar acquaintances. Could a disjointed collection of fables by any possibility yield such a result?

It is in the same way that we are made acquainted with the central personage of the history. To my mind, as I have repeatedly taken occasion to say, the character of Jesus is hardly more wonderful than the manner in which it is portrayed. Not an attempt is made to describe him. Various scenes, of which he is the centre, are related, thrown together with scarcely any arrangement, and how sublime the result! A character as natural as it is original, as human as it is divine,—an ideal which Christendom is now struggling to realize, and which, were it realized, would create a new heaven and a new earth!

It would be out of the course of human ex-

perience to suppose that the narrators have never put words into the mouth of Jesus which he did not use, or that they have not here and there stated, not what he said, but what they understood him to mean. That we shall ever attain to so intimate a knowledge of him as to be able, using our knowledge as a criterion, to distinguish with precision what belongs to him and what to his reporters, in other words, that we shall ever have it in our power to extricate him from the medium through which his image is transmitted to us, I hardly venture to predict.

There is one respect, however, in which this can be done with considerable confidence.

Certain passages of his history show, as one trait of his character, his singular freedom from that pride of race, which was the distinguishing mark of his countrymen, a pride all the more bigoted for having its root in religion. One of his first public utterances,—it was in the synagogue at Nazareth,—was a rebuke of that fierce Jewish sentiment,—a rebuke so bold that his hearers were filled with wrath, and ready to tear him in pieces on the spot. He was guilty in their eyes of profaning their Holy Writings by quoting

them to prove that the God of Israel had once and again passed by his chosen people to show favor to base Gentile dogs.

Mark, furthermore, the grand inference that he instantly drew from the faith in him manifested by the Roman centurion. There was at once unveiled before him a vision of the nations flocking from the East and the West, from the North and the South, to the divine kingdom.

Again, the parable of the feast from which the chosen guests were excluded, and to which the poor from all the highways and hedges were summoned, and, still more pointedly, the immortal parable by which the Jew was made to acknowledge the odious Samaritan, rather than priest or Levite, as his neighbor, to be loved as he loved himself, prove how far Jesus was in advance of his country and his time in the recognition of the brotherhood of mankind.

That his was no "closet philanthropy, dreaming of impracticable reforms, and grudging the cost of effectual relief," no barren abstraction only intellectually discerned, but a profound, active conviction, close to his heart, is seen in the readiness with which he put it into any shape

that occasion might require. It was in daily practical use. We are justified, therefore, in regarding his freedom from Jewish exclusiveness, his recognition of human brotherhood, not merely as a precept or doctrine which he taught, but as a vital principle of his being, as a component of his character, distinguishing him not only as a teacher, but as a man.

Here then is one respect in which his personal character, being thus known, becomes a touchstone whereby it may be determined whether, in certain cases, he really said or did what is attributed to him, or whether he was misunderstood, and consequently not correctly reported. His reporters were Jews; and it is much more likely that they should put a Jewish construction upon his words or acts than that he should have spoken so entirely out of character as, for example, he is recorded to have done in the fourth chapter of the fourth Gospel, where, in the midst of one of his grandest utterances, a narrow Jewish word occurs. The time is coming, he told the woman of Samaria, when neither the Jerusalem of the Jews nor the Mount Gerizim of her countrymen would be specially hallowed, when not

the place but the spirit would be acceptable. God is a spirit, and they that worship must worship him in spirit. I cannot believe that inspired, filled as he was at the moment with this great truth, it could have occurred to him to make the invidious distinction which is made in what he is further reported to have said to the woman: "*You (Samaritans) worship you know not what. We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.*" I suspect this to be a marginal comment of some Jewish transcriber that has crept into the text.

In order to render the appeal to the character of Jesus, in any questionable case, as a test decisive and satisfactory, it will not be enough to allege an inconsistency, we must be able to show with a good degree of probability how he came to be erroneously reported.

Take, for example, the story of the Transfiguration. It is on the face of it inconsistent with the spiritual character of Jesus. His glory is moral. An external, visible illumination of his person is at variance with the inward scope and tenor of his teachings. But I cannot dismiss the story altogether solely on this account. The

question remains: How came such a story to be told? There must have occurred something that gave rise to it. Upon a critical examination of the different narratives of the scene we find good reasons for believing that the alleged transfiguration of the person of Jesus is resolvable into a dream of Peter's, occasioned in part by a cloud that passed over the mountain attended by thunder and lightning. The grounds of this interpretation of the passage I have stated at length elsewhere, and will not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that it appears to me to be required by sound principles of criticism. It is not resorted to merely to avoid the literal understanding of the passage and to explain away a miracle.

In the passage which tells of the suffering woman who went behind Jesus and touched him in the belief that the touch would cure her, one of the Gospels puts into his mouth certain words (*I perceive that virtue has gone out of me*) which we may be confident he never uttered. The woman, suffering under an infirmity pronounced unclean by the Jewish law and unwilling that it should be known, trusted to being secretly relieved by

touching his clothes. A wild fancy it seems. But when we duly weigh the probable circumstances of the case and consider what extraordinary things were taking place, how all men's minds were excited, with what awe and transporting hope the sick and diseased were regarding Jesus; how this woman, having exhausted all known means of relief, was moved by all that she had seen and heard done by him, we shall perceive that it was simple human nature in her to seize the idea that she could be thus healed. When she pressed through the crowd, all in a tremble, with her whole soul in the act, is it conceivable that, when she got near enough to him, she barely touched him with her finger-tips? Through some gap in the throng she clutched at his garments with a grasp made convulsive by her emotion, and at the touch the secret vital forces of her nature were shocked into overpowering activity, and she felt that she was well. It was by the quick, energetic twitch that she gave his clothes that Jesus divined that it was given with a purpose. He instantly stopped and demanded to know who it was that had done this thing. Surmising

the true state of the case, that it was some one who expected some benefit from the act, he desired to know what it meant. When the woman came forward and acknowledged that it was she who had caught at his garments and told her story and declared herself relieved, he assured her that it was her own faith that had healed her, thus correcting her impression that there was a miraculous healing power in him. He could not, therefore, have said that *he felt the virtue go out of him*. How he came to be reported as so saying it is easy to see. The bystanders, like the woman, believed that he was possessed of a peculiar gift, that a miraculous power dwelt in him. One of the three narratives relates the incident briefly and says nothing of the *virtue's going out of him*. Another mentions it, but does not say that Jesus said anything about it. It states it, obviously, as the inference of the people. When we consider how accounts of even ordinary incidents always grow and vary, we see how natural it was that the impression should have gone abroad that Jesus *said* that he perceived the virtue go out of him, and that it should be so reported.

This passage is one of those which many have no hesitation in pronouncing fabulous, and there is indeed an element of the fabulous in it. But it is this fabulous particular that proves the reality of the incident. The idea that the woman was cured by a medical virtue emanating from the person of Jesus,—that is fabulous. Does not this misconception necessarily presuppose the fact misconceived? What more indubitable signature of truth could a narrative show? The narrators have related an incident which they did not understand. Can fabricators of fictions possibly misunderstand their own inventions?

To turn to another passage in which language is attributed to Jesus, which it is doubtful whether he ever used. On a certain occasion Peter asked him what he and his fellow disciples, who had left all to follow him, were to receive in return. According to one of the Gospels, the reply of Jesus was a simple, emphatic statement of the law of compensation. They who followed him, he said, would receive a hundred fold in this world, and an enduring life in the world to come. The self-sacrificing service of Truth is its own exceeding reward now and forever. But in one

Gospel he is reported as saying further, that the Twelve should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and in another he is represented as appointing them to these offices. I cannot believe that he ever made such a promise or such appointments, because it is so unlike him. He looked for no worldly offices nor honors either for himself or for his friends. He accounted himself and them doomed to suffering and death. When two of his disciples petitioned him for the two highest places in his kingdom, "Can you drink of the cup that I am to drink of," he instantly exclaimed, "and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Service,—self-sacrificing service was the only greatness in his eyes. Besides, it is plain how this promise came to be ascribed to him. His disciples, infatuated with the idea that he was the magnificent Messiah, were following him in the confident expectation that he would enrich and ennoble them. Accordingly, when he assured them they would be paid a hundred times over for all that they had given up for his sake, they had but one idea of the reward they were to receive. They could conceive of no other. They

were to be compensated with worldly honors. This was what they doubted not that he meant; and consequently they have reported him as saying what they understood him to mean.

To mention one instance more. I doubt whether he said certain things that are ascribed to him in the accounts of the Last Supper. No part of his history has been more sadly misunderstood, or given occasion to more monstrous errors. It does not appear ever to have been considered what an hour of agonizing emotion that was to him. The awful end was at hand. He was momentarily expecting to be arrested and dragged away to a lonely and violent death. The traitor who was plotting against his life was there before him. For the sake of his humble friends, from whom he was about to be torn, he was, with unheard-of strength of mind, crushing down an agony of suspense so terrible that it seemed to him,—as he said after they had left the table and were in the garden, where the long-sustained tension of his mind gave way utterly for a while,—as if he should die. His soul was sick unto death. Images of horror rose before him; the commonest objects became omens and portents.

Most touchingly characteristic is it of him and of our human nature, that the broken bread and the red-flowing wine should speak to him of his own lacerated flesh and streaming blood. So vividly did the resemblance flash upon his tortured imagination that for the instant the visible vanished behind the invisible, the signs disappeared in the grim presence of the things signified; and as he broke the bread and poured out the red wine he exclaimed, "It is my body! It is my blood! Take! eat! drink! I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine." So much only do I feel sure that he said. The words, "*till I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God,*" are a qualifying clause which I find it more natural to suppose was added by his disciples, who could not endure to think that he did not contemplate feasting in the coming kingdom, than to believe that any such proviso could have occurred to him at a moment of such intense emotion. The further declaration that his blood was "*the blood of the new testament shed for many for the remission of sins,*" has an explanatory, didactic, dogmatic air, alike incongruous with the profoundly emotional state of his mind. I think I perceive how it came to be at-

tributed to him. His disciples, I conceive, were shocked by this sudden and startling allusion to his blood. They knew not what to make of it. What could it mean? The only construction they could put upon it after his death was that it was an allusion suggested by the season of the Passover to the blood of the Paschal lamb. Conceiving this to have been his meaning, they have again reported him as saying in so many words what they believed that he meant.

VII. Whether we have yet so intimate a knowledge of the character of Jesus as to authorize interpretations like the foregoing may be a question. There is one quality of his, however, which gives out a strong light, putting life into the Gospel narratives and harmonizing the whole history, a fact which I do not say has wholly escaped notice,—that could hardly be,—but to which no adequate weight has been given. I refer to the extraordinary personal power of Jesus, to the native strength of his character, that natural force which is common, in every variety of degree, to all men, and which, signified chiefly through the voice and the eye, is

felt even by brutes. It existed in Jesus in an unprecedented measure.

Strange is it, by the way, that one who was distinguished above all men by his native force, one, in comparison with whom we are but phantoms, should now have faded away in the view of so many into a dim vision. It is plain how it has happened. The errors that have gathered so thickly around him have so obscured and distorted the idea of him that his native human qualities have ceased to be discoverable.

His extraordinary force of character is proved not by any direct notices of it, but again and again altogether undesignedly on the part of the writers. No fact could be more decisively established.

That he was a person of commanding and attractive presence, that there was that in his countenance, in his voice, in his whole manner, that arrested notice, inspired confidence, won admiration and love, is apparent throughout, wholly unconsciously, and consequently far more satisfactorily than could have been made to appear by the most elaborate description of his person. The common people flocked to him in

crowds. Women brought their infants for him just to touch them. One poor, outcast woman threw herself at his feet and covered them with her kisses, and bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Another believed that if she could only touch the hem of his garment it would do more than all the physicians in the world to relieve her of the infirmity under which she had long been a sufferer. It is a remark of Hume's that "admiration and acquaintance are altogether incompatible towards any mortal creature." In contradiction of this assertion, which is made even more positively by a common proverb, they who were daily in attendance upon Jesus, instead of becoming familiar with him, regarded him with a reverence that deepened into awe. How revering the trust was with which he had inspired them is seen in the ever memorable incidents at the Last Supper, in the silence, unbroken save by one, with which they submitted to the menial office which he knelt to discharge for them, and in the cry "Is it I? Is it I?" which, when he told them there was a traitor among them, broke forth all around the table, and which, far more

emphatically than any direct asseveration of their faith in him, tells us how instinctive was their conviction that they might prove the basest of traitors sooner than he could breathe a syllable that was not true. What a tribute to the dignity of his presence was the confusion into which they were thrown who were sent to arrest him ! How kingly must have been his silence when, friendless and forlorn, with the yell of demoniac bigotry, athirst for his blood, ringing in his ears, he stood before Pilate, and that magistrate, to whom, proud Roman that he was, there could hardly be a more contemptible object than a miserable Jew, shrunk from passing sentence upon him, and resorted to every subterfuge to avoid doing so !

Thus these special and undesigned illustrations of the person of Jesus strengthen the belief, which would be justified even if we had not these particulars, that he, whose name has been such a power through all these centuries, must have been a man of extraordinary force of character. Could the common, vague idea of him be displaced by a just sense of the quality of his person, we should be prepared to perceive how it

was that at the sound of his voice, at the glance of his eye, at the touch of his hand, at his presence, nay, at his bare name, all depressed spirits were exhilarated, disordered minds recovered their soundness, and the vital forces of the sick and the lame and the blind were stimulated to unwonted sanative activity. To my mind, the Gospels are all the more credible for the accounts they contain of such consequences attending him.

When due consideration is given to the personal quality of Jesus, the secret of his so-called miracles is solved, and the idea that he was preternaturally gifted is found to be needless. The force that was native to him, the power belonging to him by virtue of his being the man he was, and which was felt in one way or another by all who approached him,—a power inherent in human nature,—fully suffices to account for the sudden recovery in his presence of the nervously diseased at least. The instances of this kind are remarkable. They may justly be termed miracles in the primary sense of the word, as synonymous with wonders. But they were as plainly natural as any effect in nature. It argues but a feeble faith in that mystery in man which we

name spirit to doubt, when it was present in so full a measure as it was in Jesus, whether it was equal to the production of those changes in the deranged and the sick.

That some of the cases are exaggerations of ordinary incidents, or even fictions, is not improbable. It would be strange if, in the universal excitement, when wonder ruled the hour, there had gone abroad no exaggerated and even groundless reports. Still, I say, had we an adequate sense of the illimitable power existing in all men in various degrees, and in Jesus in the highest degree, we should be prepared even for the most extraordinary of the demonstrations of it related in the Gospels, always provided that the accounts of them bear intrinsic marks of being true.

Holding the marvellous effects that waited on his steps to be due to the powerful personality of Jesus, and to have followed him naturally,—some of these reported effects being produced by him even involuntarily,—we are enriched with a new sense of simplicity and truth as we mark the wonderful strength of mind which he evinced in relation to them,—more wonderful

even than the effects themselves. When alone, he suffered severe mental conflicts. But so complete was the self-mastery in which they resulted, that when he returned from them and was confronted with distracting realities, not a tremor of self-exultation or of self-distrust disturbed the perfect balance of his mind. It is clear to me that, having at heart only high, spiritual aims, he had not anticipated such remarkable physical effects. They took him by surprise in the first instance, and he retreated from them to solitude and prayer.

Certainly nothing apparently could be more accidental and unlooked for than the first instances of his personal influence which are recorded. The account of his first appearance as a teacher and of what followed thereupon is of exceeding interest, it throws so strong a light on all that succeeded. Upon the occasion of his first speaking in the synagogue, he was suddenly interrupted, and the decorum of the place broken in upon, by a crazy man, who was so affected by the appearance and discourse of Jesus, rendered all the more impressive by the awed silence of the assembly, that, losing control of himself, and

giving expression to the admiration in which we may infer from the effect upon him that all present shared, he spoke out in the character of the evil spirit by which he imagined himself to be possessed, and addressed Jesus as the Holy one of God ; and when Jesus instantly virtually commanded him to hush, when the personal influence of Jesus, which had already impressed him so powerfully, was thus turned full upon him, he was so much the more agitated that he shrieked and fell down in a fit. The convulsions into which he was thrown, regarded by all present as the violent efforts of the foul spirit, by which he was held to be possessed, struggling against the authority of Jesus, succeeded as they were by the man's restoration, at once created in every one an awful sense of the power of the speaker. The rumor of this startling incident ran like a wind-fanned flame. The sick heard it in their beds, and the springs of life in them burst forth with a new energy. In the house whither Jesus,—followed by a crowd, doubtless,—went from the synagogue, there lay a woman sick with a fever. Upon his entrance into the chamber, at his presence, at the thrilling touch of his hand, she

threw off the fever, forgot her weakness, rose to her feet, and instantly was able to take active part in the offices of hospitality. At sundown, when the Sabbath was ended, crowds gathered round the house, "the whole city," the record states. Among them persons suffering under the influence, as was imagined, of malignant spirits, were relieved, I can readily suppose, by the bare sight of Jesus.

Taking this account as it stands, without allowing ourselves to be biased by preconceived and traditional representations of these scenes, we cannot but perceive that these remarkable effects were produced well-nigh involuntarily on the part of Jesus, apparently with no consciousness of having exerted any extraordinary power. Amidst the storm of public feeling he remained calm and erect. Its only effect upon him was to deprive him of sleep that night. The next morning, "a great while before day," he left his bed and sought seclusion to ponder the situation and seek strength from the Highest. The result was that he decided not to return then to the scene of that unlooked-for excitement.

It is interesting to note that, as after the heaven-

revealing experience of his first public step, his baptismal self-consecration, he was driven into solitude to collect himself, so now, after his next step, which brought an experience almost as exciting, he was driven again, and from his bed, to seclusion and prayer.

When he returned in a few hours from his retirement, and similar scenes were repeated, and the popular enthusiasm surged around him, unconscious as he was of having caused it by any intended exercise of extraordinary power, so far from availing himself of it to advance his influence with the people, his whole attention was fixed, to the forgetfulness of self, upon the faith which they put in him, and which wrought these sudden and powerful effects. Then it was, I conceive, that it broke upon him as a revelation: the Power of Faith. This was what he learned from what he witnessed. With what emphasis did he always afterwards magnify faith! He might well do so, seeing what imposing demonstrations of it were daily passing before his eyes.

VIII. We are so accustomed to dwell upon the influence which Jesus has had, that we make

no account of the influences which acted upon him, or of the manner in which he was affected and educated by his surroundings. Indeed, the dogmas that have prevailed concerning his nature and offices have caused us to overlook the fact that he was sent into being, as all men are, to live and to learn, for his own perfection as well as for the sake of others. To him, as to every soul of flesh, life was a discipline.

And when was there ever one so docile as he, so quick to catch the import of events? He read off the deep meaning of Suffering at sight and got it instantly by heart. He learned the ways of the eternal Providence from the sunshine and the rain, from a falling sparrow and a grain of mustard-seed. The lessons which the most familiar incidents taught he understood as readily as if they were articulated in his mother-tongue. We call him the great Teacher. He was the greatest of teachers, in that he was the greatest of learners. He "learned Obedience," the immortal lesson! and was perfected by all that he saw and suffered,—in a word, by his experience. And what an experience was his!

Of the first thirty years of his life we know

little or nothing. However secluded that period may have been, however limited its opportunities, the whole tenor of his subsequent career presupposes that it was a period of steady, spiritual growth, of natural, unconscious preparation for the life which he entered upon in his thirtieth year or thereabouts. That those early years were not spent in any ascetic practices, away from the concerns of common life, in absorbing meditation upon the mysteries of life, is evident first from the character of his public teachings, and, in the next place, from the manner in which he illustrated them.

It was with no vague abstractions, no abstruse nor mystical speculations, that he dealt, when he began to talk in public. He had evidently learned what a dead, putrid, formality the religion of the time had become; how the plain commandments of God were made of no effect by human traditions; how false to God and to man were they who assumed to give the law to the people. He read the hearts of the dominant classes like a book. It was no new things that he professed to reveal, but truths written from the first in nature and the human soul,—truths

the most practical, and searchingly applicable to the moral needs of the time. He affirmed the violated law of God, the two commandments,—the love of God and the love of one's neighbor,—than which he declared there were none greater. Seeing the ruin which the corruption of the ruling classes and of religion was working, he foresaw what was foreseen also by John, who preceded him, and, doubtless, more or less clearly by others also, the coming providence or kingdom of God in the downfall of the nation. Humble and confined as were the aspects of life to him in the first private period, still he was then daily learning to know men and things. That his quick and extraordinary insight, his instinctive aptitude in interpreting the signs of the time were due to an exquisitely organized, highly-gifted nature, there is no doubt. Nevertheless, as there is no sphere of life that is not disciplinary, that he was growing in those early years ever more and more interested in the great truths which had his heart, ever stronger in faith and in sympathy with his suffering fellow-men, it is only natural to conclude.

As the truths which most interested him thus

indicate how his early life was spent, so, likewise, the manner in which he was wont to present them shows how familiar he was with Nature and with Life. He found his illustrations in the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, in the wind, in the light, in the seed cast into the earth, in the net thrown into the lake, in the city set on a hill, in the candle lighted in the house, in the leaven put into the bread, in the wine in the wine-skin, in the garments that were worn, in festive and bridal occasions, and in children playing in the market place. Does it not all show as plainly as if it were recorded in so many words that he was living during those thirty unknown years in the world, not out of it, and that by the ceaseless ministry of Nature and Life he was being educated for his great career?

At last the inevitable hour came when he could be silent no longer, when he must quit the sphere to which he was confined, turn his back upon kindred and home, and go forth and warn and comfort the people, and deliver them from their fatal delusions respecting the coming kingdom, and from the soul-destroying

bondage of the letter under which they were crushed.

Seeing clearly the sore need there was of the publication of the truth, he could not but have foreseen, long before he publicly appeared, that, such was the temper of the governing classes, it would be at a perilous cost to take this step. He knew his own purpose. He knew the ruling spirit of the time. Consequently he must resolve to meet that spirit in deadly collision.

Suddenly, travellers, coming in from the desert, brought report, startling the whole country, of a voice heard there crying aloud and warning the people to prepare for the Divine Coming, which, to those who read the signs of the time, cast a shadow of darkness and wrath before, but which the people fondly imagined was to introduce a glorious national empire. From all parts of Galilee and Judea, and from the distant capital, Jerusalem, the people flocked to that strange figure that appeared, like one of the great prophets of the Past, clad in a garment of camel's hair, girt with a leathern girdle, and subsisting on the produce of the desert, locusts and wild honey. And he bathed the people in

the Jordan, the sacred river, in token of inward cleansing and newness of life. It was a great religious revival which swept all classes before it. Even Pharisees, and Teachers of the Law, wrapt round and round in spiritual pride though they were, yielded to the popular stream, and, for fear of risking their popularity, were found in the multitudes that thronged the banks of the Jordan. This state of public feeling determined the mind of Jesus.

And now, when he stands upon the threshold of a new life, is it to be conceived that he ceases to be a learner? If, in that humble sphere where he saw so little of the world, he was constantly growing, gathering wisdom in the meanest places, how much more must he have learned in that larger and public sphere upon which he now entered! How new and all-searching and all-inspiring must his experience be now!

To most of those who went to John, baptism, I imagine, was more or less a mere form, superstitiously observed. But to Jesus it was a deed of the saintliest heroism, the beginning of a new era in his life. It was the first step, the step

that costs, the “conversion of his conviction into act,” by which he bound himself irrevocably, beyond the possibility of retreat, to the fulfilment of his great purpose. The one thing, that he must do or die, could be done only by the unreserved surrender of himself to the Supreme Will as that was signified by the voice within. He saw,—he could not help seeing,—the danger, the death that awaited him. It was, therefore, not formally, but with the whole force of his will in the act, that he deliberately, solemnly, publicly, thus expressed his inward cleansing from all hesitation and weakness.

And the consequence was that there instantly welled up within him an ineffable peace, unlooked for and more profound than he had ever before experienced, the natural warrant of so pure an act of self-renunciation. It could not otherwise be than that, when the truth of God filled all his soul, there should come with it the peace of God that passeth all understanding. Accordingly, it seemed to him as if Heaven itself was thrown wide open to him, and so raised was his imagination that a dove, hovering within the sphere of his uplifted vision, was transfigured into a sym-

bol and messenger of the Divine Spirit, and there was borne in upon him, as by a voice speaking, the revelation of a relationship between him and the Highest, which could be represented only by the relation of a son to a father. Thus he had the sure witness of the spirit within that he was a Son of God. And so in him, as in no other, the Sonship of all Humanity, and consequently the Fatherhood of the Highest, are revealed.

I have dwelt much and often upon this passage in the life of Jesus. And still I want words to tell the sense of truth which it creates in me. Nowhere in all his history does he seem more real, more human, more divine, than when coming up out of the baptismal waters.

The manner in which I view this scene is of special interest on this account: it shows us how he arrived at the full consciousness of his intimate relation to the Highest, and that it was no abnormal state of mind, no hallucination, the product of fancied visions and alleged preternatural communications, but was as natural and human as it was divine.

The open heavens, the descending dove, the

voice from heaven, were not phenomena addressed to the uncertain bodily senses, the miraculous causes of the consciousness produced in Jesus, but they were the effects of that consciousness, the forms of speech, the figures of the imagination suggested and necessitated by it.

Deep feeling always craves expression in bold figures of speech, and the bolder they are the more easily may we gauge the depth of feeling which has created them. How pure and earnest must have been the purpose, how profound the peace, attending this first step towards its fulfilment, when that peace could be described only as the very heavens above unveiled, and the very Spirit of the Highest descending in bodily shape !

Thus we see that life was to him what it is to all men ; that his spirit, like his body, grew ; that as he passed from meditation to act, as he proceeded to execute his high aims, a new and all-inspiring experience was his. A consciousness was created in him of oneness with the Greatest and Best, which the boldest figures of the imagination, and the closest natural relations, were all inadequate to represent.

His retirement to the desert after that high act

of self-consecration was the natural consequence of the change then wrought in him. He could not go back to his old home and resume his accustomed place there. The former comparative repose of his mind was gone. His instant need was solitude.

Of the manner in which he spent the time passed in the desert we have only a brief sketch. Only a few prominent particulars are noted, after the manner of such simple, unskilled writers as the authors of the Gospel narratives show themselves to have been. That nothing was known of him during those forty days, that his mother and kindred felt no concern for him, are suppositions altogether improbable. It can hardly be doubted that they knew where he was, that they went occasionally to see him, and to carry food to him, although he ate so little that it could be said, speaking popularly, as the authors of the Gospels wrote, that he ate nothing. Such circumstances were of too ordinary a character to be noticed by writers who evidently thought only of relating such incidents as struck them as remarkable. The result of his retirement was the conquest of every temptation to be false to his great purpose.

How marked the difference between Jesus and John the Baptizer! The fervid temperament of John could brook no accommodation to the common ways of life. He could find no fit dwelling-place but in the desert, away from his fellow-men. To Jesus solitude was only an occasional necessity, to repair the exhaustion of his spirit, and keep its high tone by communion with the Highest. He dwelt in the desert only for a time, and returned to Galilee full of spiritual power. When at home again, he adopted no peculiar mode of life in order to gain public attention. He waited for the Sabbath, and the synagogue which he was accustomed to attend.

Of the impression made by his first appearance as a teacher, and of the effect upon himself, I have already spoken. Here it is, at the very beginning of his public life, that we have illustrations of his personal greatness hardly less impressive than those which mark the closing hours of his life.

Young and without any previous similar experiences, upon his first appearance he was greeted by the most imposing demonstrations of popular favor. Such startling incidents attended

him that he was at once the object of all men's wonder. They crowded around him from all quarters. The rumor of his words and acts ran like wildfire, losing nothing, we may be sure, of the marvellous as it spread. At one time, we are told, there was such a coming and going, that he and his attendants had not time "so much as to eat." Again, the crowds were so great that they trampled one upon another. He had to keep a boat in waiting upon the shore of the Galilean lake, where he first appeared, that he might escape when the pressure of the multitude became too great. And when he made use of the boat to cross to another part of the lake, instantly the lake was covered with boats filled with people, determined not to lose sight of him, while he himself, so exhausted was he, fell into a sleep so deep that the uproar of a sudden squall upon the lake could not awaken him. The whole country heaved with the sensation he was causing. He saw deranged minds, through the faith that was put in him, restored to sanity, and limbs withered, and swollen with leprosy, and sightless eyes, recover their soundness.

How could it be but that such an extraordinary state of things must have affected him greatly? It did affect him profoundly. But with a god-like insight into the truth, he put no self-serving construction upon it. It was a revelation to him of the mighty power of Faith. Divinely unconscious of what it was in himself personally that had all at once inspired this boundless trust in him, unaware of any peculiar difference between himself and others, he appears never once to have thought of accrediting himself with these sudden cures, but was filled with wonder at the power of the confidence reposed in him. This, I reiterate, this it was that took his eye as the all-powerful agency.

Thus his faith *in* Faith was deepened beyond measure. It penetrated to the inmost of his being, and awoke there a sense of power which only such a person, with such an experience, could have. And it was, I sacredly believe, in the unrivalled energy of his own faith, quickened into all-conquering activity by his extraordinary experience, that he called Lazarus from the grave and awoke himself from the deep slumber.

It is comparatively easy to appreciate the greatness of mind which illumines the last hours of his career, and which has changed the vile cross into the world's most sacred symbol. But, in truth, the very beginning of his public life, when, in his youth and inexperience, he was hailed with the acclamations of the people, manifests no less impressively the same imperial character. He was alike unmoved by the horrors of a lonely and violent death and by the blandishments of the most enthusiastic popular favor. When the admiring wonder of a great multitude is concentrated upon him, he shows no consciousness of the ordeal to which he is subjected. The shouts of the people make no more impression upon him than if he heard them not. He is as deaf to those seducing voices from the very first as he is to the imprecations of his priestly persecutors at the last. In fine, he is always, under the most trying circumstances, so perfectly self-possessed, so wholly himself, that we fail now to be struck by a greatness of mind as uniformly and as naturally sustained as if it were the merest matter of course, and nothing else were possible. We are insensible to it even as he himself was uncon-

scious of it. Not until we recollect his temptations in the wilderness at the first, and his agony in the garden at the last, are we made to feel how great he was in the early period as well as in the late, and how entirely his greatness in both was due to no phlegmatic insensibility, but to a nature as noble as it was tender.

The truth which I emphasize is, that the strength, the wisdom, the spiritual elevation, that distinguished him, he gathered through the ministry of life. His verbal teachings are of the loftiest excellence. But, taken apart from him, they have no more weight than the wise sayings of any other of the great teachers of mankind. As to their practical influence, separate from him, they might as well have come down to us anonymously.

But when we view him, as we have now been doing, as a man living to learn, tried and educated as all men are, then we perceive that his utterances were no hearsays of tradition, no commonplaces of custom and authority, but the ejaculations of his own life. He spake what he knew from his own experience, what he himself felt profoundly. His words come weighted with

a quite peculiar personal power. They breathe and burn with his own life. He thus communicates himself to us. There is a deep significance in the Apostolic phrases, *Christ in us*, *Christ formed within us*.

It was recently remarked in a distinguished periodical that the life of Jesus was uneventful. What did the writer mean? The Life of Jesus, an event second to none in all history, whether we consider what has come of it or what it was in itself, uneventful! Was that high act of self-consecration, with which the public period of that life began, and from which pours a flood of light upon the identity of the human and the divine,—was that not an event? Or that other baptism of blood, a like revelation,—was that no event? Was not the triumph of that young man over the adoring homage of multitudes on the one hand, and over bigotry and hate, armed with all the sanctities of the Church and all the powers of the State, on the other,—were not these, events? Was not his every step, his every word, eventful? The truth is, what with the superstition and the scepticism which paralyze,

the one the imagination and the other the common intelligence of men, it seems as if these wonderful records might as well never have come down to us. The Letter is dead. Is it a waste of time and labor to endeavor to bring it back to life? Must we give up the dear hope of the world's being blest by beholding actualized in Jesus the divine possibilities that may be realized in all men? "There is something in the character of Christ," says an English writer,* "*more likely to work a change in the mind of man by the contemplation of its idea alone, than any to be found in history, whether real or feigned, a sublime humanity such as was never seen on earth before nor since.*" Are we never to have a clear vision of this all-saving charm?

To quote the wisdom of other great teachers to prove that Jesus was not original is altogether aside from the true idea of him. Wise as are his words, and wonderful as were the effects he produced, it is not what he said or did, but what he was, that distinguishes him from all others, and which has wrought with such telling power.

* Hazlitt, *Dramatic Literature*.

Herein he stands above comparison among all born of woman. George Eliot somewhere contrasts in happy phrase "the assiduous restlessness of doing with the serene dignity of being." To Jesus are we indebted for a new sense of the power of being. He had no scheme to carry out, no creed to be argued, no church to organize, no collections of monies to make, no machinery to set in motion. He lived a divinely human life, saying and doing the best the hour called for as naturally as he breathed, turning all occasions, even the most common, the most sudden, the most adverse, into opportunities so fitting that it seems now as if all Nature and all Life reverently waited upon him at every step. His words were but imperfectly understood, cast abroad upon no welcoming soil. His acts the saints of the day ascribed to the Devil. Nevertheless, through his whole being there breathed a mighty life as constantly and unconsciously as the breath of his lungs. As unconsciously, both on his part and theirs, was it communicated to those who were within his personal sphere; and then by the silent, unacknowledged method of nature, as swells the seed, man knows not how,

they grew up out of the darkness, in which they were sunk, up into the immortal air and boundless sunshine of a new world, a world one with his. Through them, by the same divine method, his spirit was conducted through an ever-broadening circle. So the kingdom of God came. So a Religion sprang from him, which is neither a creed nor a form, but a spirit, a spirit, not of fear, nor of bondage, but of "love and power and a sound mind," a spirit, in which all may share, be they Catholic or Protestant, Trinitarian or Unitarian, Free Religionist, Jew, Hindoo, Parsee, or Mahometan.

If there ever existed a man who passed in his day for the rankest of Radicals, it was Jesus, the Nazarene. And yet for what ultra Conservatism has his authority been claimed now for centuries ! That such an institution as the Roman Catholic Church, with its Hierarchies, Ceremonials, and Inquisitions, should have followed upon his life, is one of the most amazing facts in the history of mankind. It only proves the omnipotence of Character : God manifest in the flesh. Jesus set the mind of the world aflame. He kindled on the earth a fire, through the smoke whereof his

figure looms, huge, formless, and men, prostrate before it, have lost their reason in the consuming heat of the imagination.

IX. Apart from its religious interest, the history of Jesus has a scientific interest; a special interest at this hour, when theories of the Universe are suggested by leading men of science that seem at least to threaten death to the religious sentiment; when men are losing faith in a living God, and even in their own existence, consciousness being defined to be a fleeting accident, a temporary "reflex action" in the ceaseless changes of matter, which alone is held to be immortal.

Now, if there has existed such a person as I believe Jesus to have been, it is a fact which we shall do well to weigh before we resign ourselves to these tendencies of modern thought. If, besides uttering the divinest wisdom and living a life of stainless purity, and suffering with regal dignity a martyr's death, he, by a brief word of his lips, by the touch of his hand, restored health to the sick and sight to the blind, if he broke the mysterious sleep of the grave, and reappeared

himself alive after death, and if all this was, as I conceive, not in violation of the natural order of things, but in entire conformity thereto and illustrative thereof, then is he a Fact *in* Nature, and any theory of Being is radically defective that gives no heed to the significance of so extraordinary a phenomenon.

So long as it is held to be essential to our Christian Faith to conceive of him as out of the order of nature, he is out of the sphere of natural science and philosophy. There is no place for him there. But should it appear that, peerless and original as he was in his whole being and working, he was, in all respects, entirely natural, then is he a Fact, not only not to be ignored in any attempt to construct a theory of Nature and of man's position therein, but, of all facts, claiming the first consideration as a pre-eminent illustration of the deepest laws of nature. Whatever else the forces of matter may explain, they do not explain him. He is an original demonstration of the power that we name spirit, distinct and apart from the forces proper to matter, native to him as a human being, and consequently, native, though latent, to all of

human kind. It is, in a word, the Divine in man, the inspiration, the life, of the Living God.

The Idea of Jesus, which his history, as I read it, gives me, obviates the materialistic tendency of the time, and is in direct antagonism thereto. I honor our great men of science, but when their speculations tend to the annihilation of God and man, I turn, for faith in both, to one greater than they,—to one in whom there is disclosed a foundation for that faith, at once objective and subjective. In Jesus we have an Ideal and a natural Fact. To a healthy and complete faith, the one is as necessary as the other. From the Gospels we obtain a flesh-and-blood representation of what he was. In what he was we have a vision of his ideal and undying life,—and ours.

Many, who put but little faith in the record, yet speak of him in very exalted terms. Where they obtain any idea of his person it is hard to discover, seeing that they reject as fabulous nearly all that is told of him. Surely it must make the greatest difference in our idea of him whether such passages of his history as those, for example, that narrate the Raising of Lazarus and the Resurrection of Jesus himself be

received as true or dismissed as fables. These events and most of the alleged so-called miracles being accepted as natural facts, there results an Idea of Jesus incomparably more powerful than the dim, impersonal glimpse of him caught from the meagre materials which are all that the sceptically inclined admit. Upon our conception of him, the Representative not of one age or race, but of all mankind, depends, of course, our conception of man universally. Those extraordinary particulars of his history, in throwing light upon man and upon man's position in Nature, throw light also upon all Nature. It is in vain, therefore, that we think to separate Religion and Science and keep them each to a domain of its own. Their intimacy is involved in the intimacy of matter and mind, in the unity of Nature visible and invisible. The Idea of Jesus is the corner-stone of sound philosophy as well as of pure religion.

“He leads us to the height
 Named of the Infinite and long-sought Good,
 And fountains of delight;
 And where his feet have stood
 Pain, Fear, and Sin lie prostrate and subdued.

“From that great Life flow forth
Immortal harmonies, of power to still
All discords born of earth,
And draw the ardent will
Its destiny of goodness to fulfil.”



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